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ABSTRACT

Uses of pre-recorded and student-generated videotape recordings in the foreign language (FL) classroom are described and discussed from the perspective of their utility in helping students achieve target language communicative competence. It is suggested that viewing authentic video materials provides an opportunity to observe extralinguistic elements (distance, body language, vocalization patterns) necessary for successful communication. Developing their own videos allows students to transform this and other "passive" knowledge into active communication. In creating and producing videos, students must first decide which actions must be performed, interact to carry them out, and finally, react to one another in communicating their message. Student-generated video projects can take many forms and be adapted for use with different levels of language, civilization, and literature classes. In small groups (3-4 people), students work out topic details, distribute the workload, and plan out-of-class meetings. Three successful video projects are described: (1) use of authentic French television news broadcasts as a model for student news broadcasts; (2) writing, production, and filming of a version of a traditional fairy tale; and (3) student performance of some type of communicative activity. Evaluation, debriefing, and written peer critiques are explained. Contains 20 references. (MSE)

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ACTION, INTERACTION, AND REACTION: THE VIDEO CAMERA AND THE FL CLASSROOM

ED 375 620

INTRODUCTION

Communication, communicative activity, communicative competence: open to any textbook prologue, skim through the articles in professional journals, read a chapter in a book dedicated to foreign language teaching and one, if not all of these words, appears at least once. No matter which methodology is practiced in the classroom, the ultimate goal for our students is the same: communication in the target language. However, defining what it means to communicate in a language has proven to be a monumental task. Hymes described communicative competence in the following manner:

> Within a social matrix in which it acquires a system of grammar a child acquires also a system of its use, regarding persons, places, purposes, other modes of communication, etc. -- all the components of communicative events, together with attitudes and beliefs regarding them. There also develop patterns of sequential use of language in conversation, address, standard routines, and the like. In such acquisition resides the child's *socio*linguistic competence (or, more broadly, communicative competence), its ability to participate in its society as not only a speaking, but also a communicating member. (Hymes, 1974, p. 75).

Hymes' original intent was to refine Chomsky's (1965) distinction between competence and performance[1] and add a social context which was necessary in order to fully describe language behavior.

Canale and Swain (1980) elaborated on Hymes' definition and posited that there were four different components to communicative competence: grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. *Grammatical competence* describes the knowledge that speakers have about the rules and features of the language. "Such

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competence focuses directly on the knowledge and skill required to understand and express accurately the literal meaning of utterances" (Canale, 1983, p. 7).

Sociolinguistic competence refers to the social norms involved in discourse. This component addresses questions of appropriateness (both in meaning and form) within the social context in which the discourse takes place (Canale, 1983, p. 7). Within this area one must also include cultural non-verbal behavior e.g., kinesics and proxemics which often aid in the interpretation or assignment of an appropriate interpretation to a linguistic message.

Discourse competence addresses the ways in which we use the features of language to form coherent and cohesive discourse. Coherence refers to our ability to relate different meanings within longer discourse units and cohesion refers to how the structure of language itself contributes to our total understanding of the "text" (Canale, 1983, p. 9). As Brown (1987, p. 199) clarifies: " ... discourse competence is concerned with intersentential relationships."

The last component in this model is that of *strategic competence.* Omaggio (1983, p. 7) describes it as "...the use of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies to compensate for gaps in the language user's knowledge of the code or for breakdown in communication for other reasons."

Canale and Swain are quick to point out that these components represent minimally the type of skill and knowledge needed to be competent in a language (Canale, 1983, p. 12). They also make a distinction between "knowledge" of this information and "actual communication" -- using that knowledge under all types of circumstances. Canale goes on to describe the following characteristics of communication:

- [It] is a form of social interaction, and is therefore normally acquired and used in social interaction;

- [it]involves a high degree of unpredictability and creativity in form and message;
- [it] takes place in discourse and sociocultural contexts which provide constraints on appropriate language use and also clues as to correct interpretations of utterances;
- [it] is carried out under limiting psychological and other conditions such as memory constraints, fatigue and distractions;
- [it] always has a purpose (for example, to establish social relations, to persuade, or to promise);
- [it] involves authentic as opposed to textbook-contrived language; and
- [it] is judged successful or not on the basis of actual outcomes. (Canale, 1983, p. 3)

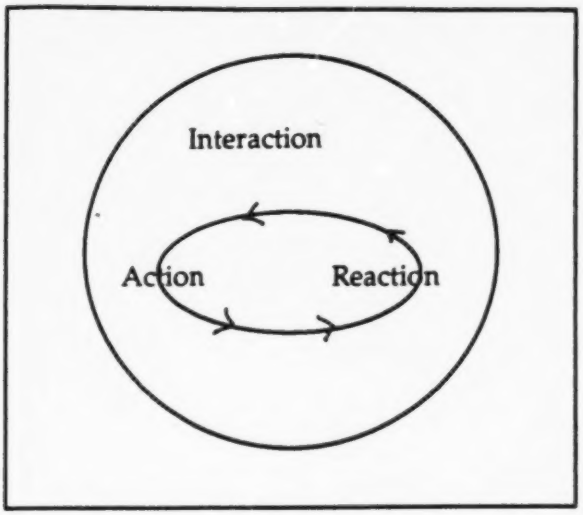
While we, as foreign language instructors, realize that communication is a complicated phenomenon, do our classroom procedures and activities produce conversations which have these characteristics? Do we view language learning in terms of grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic, and strategic competence? As Savignon (1990, p. 12) points out, we are accustomed to thinking about language learning in terms of the acquisition of the four skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. This, in and of itself, is a formidable task for both instructors and students. When we add the additional complex dimensions mentioned above, the task seems almost impossible. Yet if we want our students to be able to communicate effectively in a foreign language, then certainly we must strive to find the tools and activities which will allow them to achieve this goal. It is our aim in this discussion to focus on the practical aspects of eliciting and evaluating "actual" communication, as well as to explore the interrelationship between *action*, *interaction*, and *reaction*.

1.0 Action, Interaction, and Reaction.

In the title of this paper, three concepts were mentioned which we feel are at the heart of communication: action, interaction, and reaction. The first of these is perhaps the easiest to define since it centers around the individual. Prior to embarking upon a speech act, the speaker goes through a series of mental processes: 1) deciding to act; 2) creating/formulating the message; and finally, 3) delivering the message. The decision to act is based upon the idea that talking always has a purpose. The speaker may feel the need to create a social relationship with another individual, or is in need of additional information, etc. (Canale, 1983, p. 3). The creation of the message is based on all the knowledge that we have about the language and social context at that point in time (based on Canale and Swain's subcomponents).[2] The final stage is the delivery of the message.[3] Once the message is sent, we enter into the realm of reaction and interaction.

Since we are assuming that communication involves at least two people, once one of the participants has made the decision to act, formulated the message, and sent it, the next logical step is that the hearer reacts to that comment and responds to it or acts upon it. This is the *reaction* stage. As the participants begin to construct the communicative event and engage in the collaborative effort of exchanging and interpreting meanings, we have *interaction.* Labov and Fanshel (1977, p. 30) point out that conversation is "... a matrix of utterances and actions bound together by a web of understanding and reactions." That is to say, that the individual participants in communication do not simply chain together a series of utterances but need to react to what the other is saying and adjust their responses in kind.

Figure 1



Rivers maintains that to an extent, conversations in the language class are more akin to pseudo-communication. "It [communication] is externally directed, not self-originating; it is dependent, not an independent, activity. The utterances may even be original in their combinations of segments, but students are not communicating anything of real import to them nor are they receiving any genuine messages from others" (Rivers, 1983, p. 43). Even within an activity designed to promote communication, the fact remains that the instructor often creates the context for the interaction based on the desire to have students manipulate certain linguistic forms. The students themselves may have very little or no interest in the outcome of that particular exchange. They may have no motivation to communicate (Rivers' terminology) beyond the desire to get through the activity. This is not to say that pseudo-communication is not important, but rather that we cannot assume that students are engaged in communicative interaction because they have successfully completed the task

which has been determined for them. Rivers believes that this type of behavior is still part of the "skill-getting" process, albeit an important one, since it gives them practice in the formulation of messages. However, she adds that true interaction requires students to "take the leap into autonomy" (Rivers, 1983, p. 43). They must be given opportunities to use their language skills where the activity is driven by the students' desire to communicate.

Rivers believes that the key to bridging the gap between pseudo-communication and autonomous communication is motivation. Our task then, as foreign language instructors, is to create activities which will engage students to the extent that they are willing to function autonomously. As we all know, finding or creating such activities is not always so simple. We have all been in the situation where we believe we have discovered an activity which is certain to motivate students into talking, only to have the activity fail in its original purpose. The reasons for this failure may be many but we have to ask ourselves, at the very least, the following questions: First, Have we taken into account the interests and needs of our students? Secondly, have we given our students all the tools which they need in order to function autonomously? (Have we given them information about the culture in which the language is used? Do they know anything about conversational strategies?) Thirdly, have we devised a task which is far beyond their present communicative competence in the language? If the activity fails because of any one of these factors, then we have not allowed our students the opportunity to become autonomous.

If we expect students to communicate, then we have to be willing to allow them to be partners in their own language acquisition process. This may seem an obvious point to make but upon closer examination, it is a valid observation. No matter how much we involve students in communicative or pseudo-communicative activities, the fact remains that we are still in the position of

being the writers, directors, choreographers, audience, and critics of what goes on in the classroom. The nature of the classroom itself puts us at center stage. We decide what to talk about, we regulate turns, and we can also gain control of the floor at any time, since by convention and tradition, we are in control of the environment. Students are accustomed to looking to us for guidance and help. We are their interpreters and tour guides, the gatekeepers of all linguistic knowledge, the great motivators. While this traditional role may make for a safe and comforting environment, it does not necessarily promote risk-taking which is an essential ingredient in interactive communication. If we want students to be able to control their linguistic output, then we have to allow them some control over their linguistic and extralinguistic input.

Given these over-riding principles involving interaction and communication, our challenge is to get students involved in autonomous behavior where they are self-motivated to speak. We believe that we have found a tool, the video camera, and a series of activities which help students move beyond pseudo-communication.

2.0 The Video Camera and the Foreign Language Classroom

Our experimentation in the classroom has led us to conclude that using video tapes, both pre-recorded[4] and, most importantly, student generated, is an effective device to encourage students to achieve true communicative competence in the target language. Within the last decade, instructors have come to rely on foreign language video materials as valuable resources for teaching students about culture, civilization, and language. According to Richardson and Scinicariello, authentic video and/or television broadcasts "provide a readily accessible source of language in context as used by native speakers. Because printed texts cannot keep pace with linguistic change,

television is often the best source of current vocabulary, pronunciation, and idioms" (Richardson and Scinicariello, 1991, p. 44).

Moreover, viewing authentic video provides students with the unique opportunity to observe the extralinguistic elements which are necessary for successful communication. "Video materials also provide the visual and paralinguistic clues - proxemics (distance), kinesics (body language), and vocalization - that must be included in language instruction if students are to learn to communicate in a second language" (Richardson and Scinicariello, 1991, p. 44). There is little doubt that viewing authentic FL video material can help students understand how native speakers convey their message, but, as we have already noted, grammatical competence is not enough to ensure successful interactive communication in that language. In order to encourage students to take "the great leap" from practice to production (Rivers, 1983, p. 41), students are being asked to create and produce their own videotaped interaction in the target language. This type of activity is designed "to help students pass from the storing of linguistic knowledge and information about how this knowledge operates in communication to actual use of this knowledge for the multitudinous, unpredictable purposes of an individual in contact with other individuals" (Rivers, 1983, p. 42). This technique gives them the opportunity to transform their "passive" knowledge into active communication, to move from the "skill-getting" into the "skill-using" phase of language acquisition.

In creating and producing their own video projects, students must first decide which *actions* need to be performed, then *interact* with one another to carry out the actions, and, most importantly, within the context of their video, they need to *react* to one another in order to communicate their message successfully. In addition to providing an audio record of the linguistic elements involved in communicative tasks, the video recording encourages students to

concentrate on non-verbal aspects of communication as well. [5] For evaluative purposes, both students and the instructor can focus in on specific problem areas by viewing and reviewing the video tape outside of class. This "permanent" record of a spontaneous communicative interaction provides valuable feedback regarding gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact, as well as constructive comments on linguistic appropriateness.

Student-generated video projects can take many different forms and can be adapted for use with different levels of language, civilization, and literature classes. One aspect of these projects which remains constant is the necessity for students to work together in groups on the creation and production of the video. Students must be able to interact with and react to each other not only in front of the camera, but throughout all stages of the planning and filming of their project. This constant, motivated interaction reduces the risk of pseudo-communication by ensuring that students are put into a situation where they must try "to use the language for *the normal purposes of language*: establishing social relations; seeking and giving information; expressing reactions; learning or teaching others to do something; hiding intentions; talking their way out of trouble" (Rivers, 1983, p. 47) and, ultimately for our purposes, completing a group project. [6]

We usually have students work in small groups of three to four people. As a group, they must work out the details of their topic, distribute the workload, decide upon outside-of-class meeting times and in general, work cooperatively. Depending on the level and focus of the course, students may be free to choose any topic they wish, or they may be given some parameters which will serve as a framework for their own ideas. In some cases, they may completely script the project, while in others, they may choose to act spontaneously after negotiating their roles and outlining the activity to be performed. The only thing that we

insist upon is that every member of the group have an equal amount of speaking time. In some cases, students are asked to come to class prepared to be video-taped while in others, students do all filming outside the classroom.[7] We offer the following brief descriptions of three video projects as examples of the sort of interactive projects which have been successful in the classroom.

2.1 Video Projects

The first project to be examined involves using authentic video as a model for subsequent student-generated videos. In a French Civilization class, throughout the first half of the semester, students view authentic video from television news broadcasts with several goals in mind: 1) to get factual information about current events taking place in France; 2) to analyze the style, format, and objectivity of French TV journalists; and 3) to compare French perceptions of contemporary problems with those of Americans. Besides the obvious linguistic benefits from exposure to many different native speakers, this sort of visual stimuli appeals to students who are part of the "television generation."[8]

At mid semester, students are put into small groups to begin working on their final video project -- a student produced French newscast. The instructor must set some guidelines for the finished project to assure that all students are evaluated fairly, but each group is responsible for determining the content, organization, and filming of the video. The parameters established by the instructor include the following: 1) one student must act as the principal newscaster for the group; 2) each presentation must include one interview with a prominent French figure (a student will assume the role of this figure); 3) each presentation must include a poll/survey segment which involves asking other students their opinion on a specific issue or event; and 4) the entire broadcast

must last between 10 and 15 minutes, with each student given an equal amount of speaking time. In this case, students are asked to film their video outside of class, using any resources and persons available to them.

The second project asks students to work in groups to write, produce, and film their own video version of a traditional fairy tale.[9] As suggested in Kramsch's model for an "interactional methodology for discussion of literary narrative," (Kramsch, 1985, p. 358) traditional folk or fairy tales can be used to introduce the discussion of literary texts in the communicative classroom .[10] One of several ways of involving students directly in the analysis and discussion of a text is to ask them to rewrite it. For this particular project, students working together in groups will first need to determine what changes must be made to the narrative text in order to transform it into a dialogue. Next they must decide on roles, discuss the setting, and determine how they will interpret the story. Depending on the level of the class, the students may decide to update the story, to place it in a contemporary cultural setting, to tell the story from the point of view of one of the minor characters, or to write a sequel or alternative ending to the story. Video-taping the project allows the students, their classmates, and the instructor to later analyze each of the different interpretations and to compare them to the original text. This process provides yet another important opportunity to engage students in real communicative interaction about a literary text.

The last of these video projects is less formally structured since the students' task is to film a video sequence in which they perform some type of communicative activity.[11] Other than some very brief time in the classroom to allow them to find a common time when they can meet and organize, all work is done outside of class. Their guidelines or parameters (mentioned above) are few. The students find a topic that interests them and which they feel they can

perform. They are responsible for every portion of the project although they may consult with the instructor if they feel the need for additional information or guidance. The purpose of this type of activity is: 1) to encourage students to extend their language use beyond the confines of the classroom; 2) to help them form relationships among themselves ; and 3) to engage them in an activity in which they are in control of what they say and do.

An interesting result of this freeform activity has been the type of situations which the students create. They have ranged from talk show formats to beauty contests to cooking shows. In an intermediate class, groups of students had a semester long project in which they had to plan an imaginary trip to Spain. They kept diaries about where they went, who they met, and what they did. It was necessary for them to keep in contact with other members of their group in order for their activities to more or less coincide. The point of the exercise was to have them investigate, as a group, something of Spanish history, culture, and civilization. The actual results have been quite unique since these "trips" to Spain have turned into mini action-adventure stories set in an exotic locale. Their videos, which were to be based on some aspect of their trips, have proven to be more creative than even those of advanced students. In addition, because these students are creating mini-movies, there are a series of different speech events within the context of the whole unit. One of the most interesting results of all these videos is the realization that students are producing scenarios which fit their interests at this point in their lives.[12] This would seem to confirm Rivers' assertion that motivation is the key to bridging the gap between pseudo-communication and autonomous interaction.

In almost all of these types of video projects, even those where the parameters are perhaps more strictly defined by the instructor, the result has been that students take these situations and make them into their own, giving

them interesting twists and turns and setting their own communicative goals. The language they use is their own creation brought about by their desire to communicate with each other and express their creativity and ingenuity. We believe that these projects have given the students the impetus to interact autonomously. The added bonus to such projects is that by videotaping their interaction, both students and instructors have the opportunity to view these performances as often as desired and we (instructors and students) can begin to evaluate them.

3.0 The Evaluation Process

After viewing each video-taped segment, we evaluate the students' performances. Remember that in the discussion above we spoke about communicative competence and said that it involved knowledge about grammar, discourse, communicative strategies, and the society in which that language is used. When we evaluate, we need to keep these factors in mind so that students can improve their communicative skills. The evaluation stage of student produced videos involves two phases: the debriefing and the written critique.[13]

3.1 Debriefing

Di Pietro (1987) suggested that after students have participated in a communicative event, some type of "debriefing" should occur. "In debriefing, the basis for all the pedagogical elaboration is the event of the students' own performances. That is all conscious building of student competence is from what the learners themselves have attempted to produce in the target language. In this way, the teacher facilitates the students' personal style of acquisition" (Di Pietro, 1987, p. 87).

In all cases, where students have been video-taped, we suggest that some time be spent viewing those videos in class (the debriefing phase). The students themselves should be asked what they found interesting, what segments they found difficult to follow, and if breakdown occurred among the participants, why did it occur?[14]

In addition, at this stage we can talk to students about extralinguistic features of their performance, e.g. sociolinguistic norms, proxemics, kinetics, posture, even eye contact. This evaluation stage is quite important since it provides some type of closure to the activity as a whole. It also allows the instructor the opportunity to assess the students' performances and gives the students valuable feedback on where specific problem areas lie. This feedback will inevitably be both positive and negative. Certainly, they should be praised for having successfully completed a communicative interaction, however they also need to know where the mistakes have occurred.

> Despite inadequacies of our present knowledge about the relevance of particular approaches to language instruction, there are excellent social motivations for teachers' drawing their students'attention to examples of fossilization, to those errors that seem to have become a permanent rather than a transitional feature of their speech...If grammatically deviant speech still serves to communicate the speaker's intent, why should we pay further attention to it? Simply because speech is linked to attitudes and social structure. Deviancy from grammatical and phonological norms of a speech community elicits evaluational reactions that may classify the person unfavorably. (Richards, 1974, p. 49)

The question as to what should be commented upon or corrected is always a difficult one. During the class debriefing stage, we tend to focus on those areas which the students themselves have commented upon, and talk about visual cues. In the last stage of evaluation, the written critique, we tend to rely on the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines as a baseline measurement.

3.2 Written Critiques

The critique sheet is an individualized form of feedback. Each student in the group receives a written evaluation of his/her performance in the speech event. This evaluation, upon which their grade is ultimately decided, is based on creativity, grammatical competence, extralinguistic competence, and level of difficulty.[15] In writing these critiques, we begin to examine the videos in more detail. As mentioned above, we use the ACTFL Guidelines to give us a basis of comparison, i.e. in videos produced by intermediate-level students, we rarely give any attention to the lack or misuse of the subjunctive or other elements which are not necessary to attain intermediate level proficiency. We look for repeated errors which lead us to believe that some aspect of the students' language has become fossilized. We comment on inappropriate use of vocabulary, incorrect verb forms, repeated mispronunciations of phonological segments, and certain aspects of intonation.[16] In other words, we critique their grammatical competence. A second area that we review is the sociolinguistic appropriateness, e.g., do they vacillate between the uses of formal and informal address. The third area that we talk about is the use of extralinguistic cues, e.g. gestures, eye contact, etc. The final stage in the evaluation process involves returning the critique sheets to the students and having them review their video again (on their own), paying close attention to the problem areas.[17]

4.0 Conclusion

Student-generated video is by far one of the most exciting and innovative projects we have used with our students. Instead of having students perform the speech acts and events which we have deemed important, they are responsible for finding an interesting and creative speech situation and then developing coherent, cohesive, and appropriate discourse in the target

language. They become the writers, directors, actors, audience, and critics of their own actions, reactions, and interactions; they are collaborative language learners. More importantly, students begin to understand that communication in the foreign language is not just the successful utterance of a few words but rather a complicated process whereby participants negotiate meaning to create a unified body of discourse. They begin to understand that their *actions* (both verbal and non-verbal) and *reactions* to other speakers produce *interaction* which leads to real autonomous communication.

NOTES

[1]Where competence is defined as the knowledge that the ideal native hearer-speaker has about his language, and performance is the actual use of that knowledge.

[2]In the case of the foreign language classroom, we have to expect that the knowledge that the student has is going to be imperfect, e.g. s/he may not have the lexical items needed to fully formulate the message (a gap in grammatical competence).

[3]This is not to say that the message necessarily has to be verbal. The action or reaction may be in non-verbal form, e.g. the raising of an eyebrow, the crossing of the arms, or a slap in the face. These will all deliver a message to the "hearer."

[4]see Altman (1989) and Stempleski and Tomalin (1990) for a more complete discussion on the use of authentic video in language teaching.

[5] For a discussion of the importance of non-verbal communication in second language learning, see Wylie (1985).

[6] Current research devoted to cooperative learning shows that in general,students learn better when given the opportunity to work in small groups. According to Karl A. Smith, students are actively involved in learning when they "have to explain what they are learning to each other, learn each other's point of view, give and receive support from classmates, and help each other dig below the superficial level of understanding the material they are learning" (Smith , 1992,p. 4). Today's increased emphasis on cooperative learning in all disciplines reinforces the notion that real communication, in the native or second language, seems to take place more efficiently if students learn to work in groups. For more information on collaborative language learning cf. Nunan (1992).

[7] There are advantages to both approaches, especially if the video camera equipment is not readily accessible to students. When possible, allowing students to film the project on their own, outside of class, usually means that they have more freedom to use the surrounding environs to create a more authentic look for their productions.

[8]Schultz (1981, p. 57) maintains that students attribute greater credibility to television newscasters than to print journalists due to the "eye contact" between viewer and newscaster which seems to increase the perceived "realness" of the information being presented.

[9]This activity has been tested in intermediate level language classes and in introductory literature classes.

[10] Kramsch suggests several possible ways of retelling the tale, recognizing that this process of rewriting , "individually or in groups, is part of the reconstruction process necessary for appropriation of the text by readers" (Kramsch, 1985, p. 363).

[11]This final activity has been used successfully in intermediate and advanced language classes.

[12]We now have a fairly complete library of student produced videos. By far the most creative and interesting are those in which the students are functioning as a close-knit group. In groups were students do not get along as well, their videos tend to be less innovative and much

more fragmented. While we surmise that it is the lack of a group dynamic which is at the heart of this phenomenon, this is a point for further research.

[13]If we are videotaping impromptu role-playing in the class, students are only debriefed and receive no writtten critique about their performances.

[14]Breakdown rarely occurs when students produce the videos outside of class. They usually have prepared themselves sufficiently to be able to get through a scene smoothly. When performances are taped in class, breakdown often does occur especially at the intermediate level where students may lack the grammatical competence to express themselves and do not employ any communicative strategies to get them over the "rough spots." At times, in out-of-class productions, students will have gathered a series of lexical items which are unknown to the other groups but which are necessary to perform their scenario. These gaps in their knowledge rarely inhibit the understanding of the event as a whole unit. In the debriefing stage, this is merely a matter of sharing that vocabulary with others in the class.

[15]This last category tends to grade the complexity of their speech. Have they built the interaction around a series of questions and answers? Is there sustained narration? Have they engaged in persuading or arguing? In more advanced classes, we encourage students to perform more complex speech acts.

[16]With advanced students, this list may be longer depending upon the skill level of the individual student.

[17]While the critique sheets are very time-consuming, student class evaluations have shown that the students find them very helpful and very much appreciate this type of individualized feedback.

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